

Message Text

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45

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-11 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8300

INFO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY LISBON

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 06056

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: A POLL ON FRENCH ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIONS

1. SUMMARY: BERGERON OF FO MAKES AN EFFECTIVE APPEAR-
ANCE ON A POPULAR TV SHOW IN WHICH HE COMMENTS ON
RECENT POLL SHOWING LARGE PERCENTAGE OF FRENCH
PEOPLE THINK UNIONS ARE TOO POLITICAL; LESS THAN
50 PERCENT BELIEVE THAT LABOR UNITY IS A GOOD THING
AND RATE FO SECOND WITH 22 PERCENT AFTER CGT WITH
34 PERCENT AND AHEAD OF CFDT WITH 14 PERCENT AS THE
UNION WHICH BEST DEFENDS WORKERS' INTERESTS. END
SUMMARY.

2. NO LESS THAN 72 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH (AGAINST
22 PERCENT) CONSIDER THAT "TRADE UNIONS ARE TOO MUCH
IN POLITICS", ACCORDING TO A RECENT POLL REVEALED IN
A NEW POPULAR TV SHOW THIS WEEK. ANDRE BERGERON,
SECGEN OF FORCE OUVRIERE, WHO WAS THE SHOW'S PRINCIPAL
AGREED WITH THE POLL, ADDING THAT THE 72

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PERCENT RESPONSE STEMS FROM THE FRENCH PEOPLE'S COMMON
SENSE WHICH REJECTS TRADE UNION INVOLVEMENT IN

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WHICH SHOULD BE LEFT TO THE
POLITICAL PARTIES.

3. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION WHICH UNION ORGANIZA-
TION IS BETTER DEFENDER OF WORKERS' INTERESTS, 34
PERCENT NAMED CGT, 22 PERCENT FO AND 14 PERCENT CFDT,
WHILE A SIZEABLE 30 PERCENT REFUSED TO
ANSWER. ASKED TO COMMENT, BERGERON ACCEPTED THE
RESULTS AS TRUE REFLECTION OF PUBLIC OPINION BUT
ADDED THAT HE WOULD HAVE HOPED THAT FO WOULD HAVE
COME AHEAD BECAUSE FO REMAINS TRUE TO TRADE UNION
PRINCIPLE OF FOCUSING ON BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES
INDEPENDENTLY OF POLITICAL PARTIES.

4. OUR COMMENT ON THIS POINT WILL CALL ATTENTION TO
CFDT'S LOW PERCENTAGE WHICH REFLECTS PUBLIC OPINION
REJECTION OF CFDT'S MILITANT TACTICS AND HIGHLY
IDEOLOGICAL STANCE CALLING FOR A RADICAL CHANGE OF
SOCIETY AS A CONDITION TO ANY IMPROVEMENT OF THE
WORKERS' LOT. THE 34 PERCENT FAVORING CGT COULD
VERY WELL HAVE BEEN HIGHER. WORKERS HAVE COME TO
APPRECIATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CGT APPARATUS,
THE SIZE OF ITS MEMBERSHIP AND THE REALISM OF ITS
LEADERS WHEN IT COMES TO NEGOTIATING WITH PRIVATE
MANAGEMENT. IMPORTANT TO NOTE IN THIS CONNECTION
THAT IN THE EYES OF MOST WORKERS CGT, DESPITE ITS
COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP, IS POLITICAL OR
APOLITICAL AS ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION. WITH REGARD
TO FO WE WOULD AGREE WITH BERGERON THAT IT DESERVED
A HIGHER PERCENTAGE, BUT FO SUFFERS FROM THE HANDICAP
THAT IS NOT PRESENT EVERYWHERE AS CGT AND CFDT HAVE
ALMOST SUCCEEDED IN DOING AND THAT FO REMAINS WEAKER
IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR COMPARED WITH THE PUBLIC
SECTOR.

5. POLL SHOWED ALSO THAT 48 PERCENT (AGAINST 37
PERCENT) FAVOR LABOR UNITY IN THE SENSE OF HAVING
A SINGLE LABOR ORGANIZATION INSTEAD OF THE PRESENT
FIVE NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED UNIONS. INTERESTINGLY,
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BERGERON THOUGHT THAT THE PERCENTAGE FAVORING LABOR
UNITY SHOULD HAVE BEEN HIGHER BECAUSE HE, TOO, FROM
A THEORETICAL POINT OF VIEW WOULD SUPPORT THE IDEA
OF A SINGLE ORGANIZATION. HE WENT ON TO EXPLAIN,
HOWEVER, THAT UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS OF LABOR
DIVISION UNITY WILL REMAIN ONLY A DREAM GOAL.

6. BERGERON DESERVES HIGH MARKS FOR HIS RESPONSE
TO THIS QUESTION BECAUSE LABOR UNITY WILL ALWAYS
BE AN IDEAL TO WHICH THE FRENCH WORKING CLASS WILL

REMAIN COMMITTED AND VAGUELY HOPEFUL THAT SOME DAY
IT WILL BECOME A REALITY. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A
MISTAKE THEREFORE FOR BERGERON TO STRESS THE
VIRTUAL IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE FRENCH LABOR MOVEMENT
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EVER BECOMING UNITED IN VIEW OF THE DEEP IDEOLOGICAL
DIFFERENCES THAT ARE DIVIDING IT TODAY AND THUS
FAIL TO PAY EVEN LIP SERVICE TO THE IDEA OF LABOR
UNITY.

7. ANOTHER INTERESTING FINDING OF THE POLL IS THAT
ONLY 48 PERCENT EXPECT THAT NEXT SPRING WILL BE
"HOT" AGAINST 41 PERCENT WHO DO NOT THINK SO.
BERGERON SAID THAT SPRING 1976 WOULD BE LIKE LAST
YEAR'S (WHICH WAS ANYTHING BUT HOT), BUT POINTED OUT
THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE

NATIONALIZED SECTOR ARE PROGRESSING WITH DIFFICULTY
IMPLYING THAT THIS MAY BECOME CAUSE OF AGITATION
IN THESE TWO SECTORS.

8. THE BIG SURPRISE OF THE TV SHOW WAS THE
APPEARANCE OF ARLETTE LAGUILLER, WHO WAS THE
TROTSKYITE CANDIDATE IN THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL
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ELECTIONS, AND WHO IS A MILITANT IN THE BANK WORKERS
UNION IN FORCE OUVRIERE AFTER HAVING BEEN EXPELLED
FROM CGT. ASKED WHY SHE IS IN FORCE OUVRIERE SHE
SAID THAT IN FO NO ONE ASKED ABOUT HER POLITICAL
IDEAS OR PUT ANY CONDITIONS TO HER AFFILIATION. "FO
IS REFORMIST," SHE ADDED, "BUT SO ARE ALL THE OTHER
LABOR FEDERATIONS. IF I AM IN FO IT IS SIMPLY BE-
CAUSE ALL THE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ARE INCAPABLE OF
TOLERATING REVOLUTIONARIES." ASKED TO COMMENT,
BERGERON SAID THAT "SHE SIMPLY SPOKE THE TRUTH.
THERE ARE MILITANTS OF ALL OPINIONS IN FORCE
OUVRIERE FROM ANARCHISTS TO GAULLISTS AND OTHERS."

9. THIS IS NOT FIRST TIME THAT BERGERON TOOK
PUBLIC PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT FO INCLUDES MILITANTS
OF VARIOUS POLITICAL BELIEFS. IT SERVES HIM WELL
TO DO SO BECAUSE IT COUNTERACTS THE CGT AND TO SOME
EXTENT CFDT ACCUSATIONS THAT FO IS AN
ACCOMPLICE OF THE REGIME AGAINST THE TRUE INTERESTS
OF THE WORKERS. LAGUILLER MAY WELL HAVE CAUSED
MITTERRAND'S DEFEAT BECAUSE OF HER SERIOUS CAMPAIGN
AGAINST HIM (SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE TO DIG INTO
MITTERRAND'S LESS COMPLIMENTARY INCIDENTS IN HIS
POLITICAL LIFE), BUT SHE IS MOST EFFECTIVE IN RE-
INFORCING FO'S TRUE IMAGE AS A LABOR ORGANIZATION
WHICH SEEKS IN A PRAGMATIC WAY TO MAKE SLOW BUT
STEADY PROGRESS IN ENLARGING THE WORKERS' SHARE OF
FRANCE'S WEALTH.

10. COMMENT: INDEPENDENTLY OF THE INTEREST IN
THE POLL AND THE COMMENTS IT ELICITED, IT IS
IMPORTANT TO HIGHLIGHT THE EXTRAORDINARY PROGRESS
BERGERON HAS MADE IN THE LAST YEAR OR SO IN HIS
HANDLING OF THE MEDIA AND ESPECIALLY TV. HE
COMES ACROSS FOR WHAT HE IS, SINCERE, PRAGMATIC,
MODEST, COMMITTED TO A TRADITIONAL TYPE OF TRADE
UNIONISM STILL VERY CLOSE TO THE FRENCH WORKER'S
HEARTS. HE USES SIMPLE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE EX-
PLAINING THAT IN THE IMPERFECT WORLD OF TODAY ONE
SHOULD APPRECIATE EVEN SMALL VICTORIES IN OBTAINING
IMPROVEMENTS AND NOT AIM AT THE ILLUSION OF
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REMAKING SOCIETY. AS LONG AS FO LEADERS ARE ABLE
TO TALK THIS LANGUAGE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A
GROWING PLACE FOR FO IN FRENCH SOCIETY.
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